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SIPDIS

AMMAN PLEASE PASS TO U/S GROSSMAN

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM PTER PINS ECON TU

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR U/S GROSSMAN'S VISIT TO TURKEY:
WHERE DOES TURKEY FIT INTO THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST (GME)
INITIATIVE?

REF: ANKARA 1230

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric Edelman; reasons: E.O.
12958 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Your visit to Ankara is a key opportunity to explain the Greater Middle East Initiative (GME) and to listen to Turkey's ideas about GME. Although GME has generated considerable commentary, few here understand its methods or aims. Internally, Turkey's path towards EU accession dovetails well with GME objectives, but success is not assured. Regionally, Turkey's example of internally generating NATO and EU-oriented reform will be instructive for others. However, in helping the Turks to fashion their regional GME role, we must be cognizant of the Turks' historical baggage in the region and the problematical question of Islam in Turkey, and we must avoid a perception of Turkey as the U.S.'s regional gendarme. End Summary.

GME in Turkey: Lots of Comments, Little Understanding

¶12. (C) In the last month, GME has been the subject of considerable press commentary, both negative and positive. Some Embassy interlocutors have asked us about GME and Turkey's role (the TGS, for example, reftel). Your interlocutors are eager to hear Washington's thinking on the details of GME -- and to give you their input.

¶13. (C) This latter point is crucial, because GME's emphasis on supporting reforms originating within the region is in danger of being drowned out by a chorus of nay-sayers who paint GME as enforcement of Washington-imposed ideology, with Turkey playing the role of Washington's gendarme. Your willingness to listen to and incorporate Turkey's ideas will be a good antidote.

Making Turkey a Success

¶14. (C) At the January Islamic Economic Forum in Jeddah and in his speech at Harvard University during his U.S. visit PM Erdogan spoke out in favor of democracy and reform in the Islamic world. At preceding OIC meetings in Tehran and Kuala Lumpur, FM Gul laid out an even broader vision for democratization and reform. In many senses, both men were also talking obliquely but very consciously about the need for transformation in their own country.

¶15. (C) The movement to improve Turkey's democracy, in the political sphere, hinges on the resolution of three fundamental questions:

-- the place of religion (both Islam and "minority" religions) in society;
-- ethnic identity and national identity;
-- individual rights and the relation between citizen and State (e.g., establishing real rule of law).

¶16. (C) It will be important to stress to the Turks that GME is not only about changing politics, but also about encouraging economic policies that produce greater prosperity. Turkey can lead by example via pursuit of sound economic policies and reforms, and also can make the point to its neighbors that the region will only succeed economically if it adopts sound, market-based policies based on rule of law.

EU Accession: A Ready Vehicle, But Beware Complacency

¶17. (C) Turkey's current focus on EU accession has been a ready vehicle for the internal changes Turkey needs to be successful. Turkey's focus on getting a date to begin EU accession talks has translated into an effective impetus for reform. Although the Copenhagen Criteria are a de facto external discipline, there is widespread sentiment that these are things Turkey needs to do for its own good.

¶18. (C) However, Turkey's success is not a given. The Turks have done well in passing laws, but now need to implement them. Everyday life in Ankara yields up examples where the basic elements of individual rights and rule of law are not respected. Turkey's EU supporters stress that complacency now will jeopardize Turkey's chances of getting a date in December. Even if Turkey does begin accession talks, the road to accession will be arduous. Faced with a long haul, the current political focus and burst of energy for reforms could flag.

¶19. (C) The Turkish economy has improved significantly over the past year, greatly reducing fears of renewed financial crisis and generating hope for sustained, low-inflation growth. However, this improvement has generated complacency among government leaders, who fail to understand that the economy's huge debt and structural weaknesses leave it vulnerable. Unless Turkey implements reforms systematically, it will miss the opportunity to move toward sustainable prosperity and away from the boom-and-bust cycles that have haunted it.

¶10. (C) Your interlocutors will readily agree when you stress the importance of fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria before December, and they will welcome your point that this dovetails with GME objectives. This is an opportunity to make the point that we view GME as a generational commitment, requiring long-term political and economic momentum.

Turkey's Regional GME Role

¶11. (C) Some of our Turkish interlocutors have asked us about what Turkey's regional GME role will be. While recognizing that Turkey's democracy and economy are still works in progress, Turks are proud of their achievements, especially over the last year, and many are willing to play a regional role. Several GOT officials have encouraged us to consult closely with Ankara on GME, believing that Turks' long association with the region can be useful in refining the initiative.

¶12. (C) Turkey has for decades seen itself and been seen as an east-west bridge. Turks are accustomed to being NATO's eastern bridge and are on the verge of becoming the EU's eastern bridge. Turkey's experiences in integrating itself into these institutions are consistent with core GME objectives. Turkey's example of internally generating reform will be instructive for others. Moreover, Ankara will welcome opportunities to share its experiences with others in the region -- experiences in making laws more democratic, training military and police to respect civilian rule and human rights, opening up markets. Turks can also deliver some messages about the need for Middle East societies to face up to their problems more easily than the U.S.

Avoiding Pitfalls

¶13. (C) However, in working together with the Turks to fashion their GME role, we need to avoid three pitfalls. First, we must recognize that Turkey has considerable historical baggage in the region and can easily engender resentment in its neighbors. Turks have a difficult time understanding and accepting this. The GME challenge for Turkey is to create a constructive regional role that avoids pushing the wrong buttons with its neighbors.

¶14. (C) Second, we need to recognize that dubbing Turkey a model of a successful "Muslim country" poses internal and external problems. Internally, the unresolved question of Islam's place in Turkey is the source of considerable tension.

¶15. (C) Third, we need to avoid feeding the misperception that Washington views Turkey as its regional gendarme. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative will focus on hard power, and the Turks will want to take a leading role as NATO pursues

it. However, we should make sure that the Turks and others in the region understand that GME is chiefly about assisting reform -- political, economic and military -- not the application of hard power.

EDELMAN